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C.I.A. Says Soviet Defense Program Could Not Blunt U.S. Nuclear Strike

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WASHINGTON, Feb. 17—The Central Intelligence Agency says that Soviet civil defense preparations are unlikely to blunt the ability of the United States to retaliate in the event of nuclear war. This assessment appears to differ somewhat from the views of the military people in the Defense Department.

In Congressional testimony made public today by the Joint Economic Committee, Adm. Stansfield Turner, the Director of Central Intelligence, said an agency review had found a steadily increasing Soviet effort to protect cities and industry against nuclear attack.

While noting that civil defense had become an integral part of Soviet military strategy, he concluded: "We do not believe that the existing preparations could prevent a general breakdown in the Soviet economy in the event of an American retaliatory strike."

He also rejected the view, advanced by some defense officials in the Ford Administration, that Soviet steps to build fallout shelters and to disperse new factories indicated that Moscow might be willing to undertake a surprise attack.

"We do not interpret this as meaning that the Soviets are planning to initiate nuclear warfare," he said in testimony before the committee in June.

Contrast With Wilson Testimony

Admiral Turner's measured assessment of the Soviet program contrasts with the subsequent testimony of Lieut. Gen. Samuel V. Wilson, the director of the Pentagon's Defense Intelligence Agency.

Although General Wilson agreed that Moscow could not protect its economy in a nuclear war, he said the Soviet Union began several programs in 1970 to insure rapid recovery from such a conflict. In particular, he said, shelters have been built for political and military leaders and procedures to evacuate large cities

before a nuclear attack appear workable. In addition, he said, Moscow plans to store enough grain by 1981 to feed the entire population for one year.

"Soviet civil defense, in conjunction with various offensive and defensive measures, has the potential to alter the strategic relationship, possibly by the mid-1980's," he concluded.

The release of the C.I.A. and Pentagon views on Soviet civil defense comes as the Administration is completing an interagency study of the problem. The study focuses not only on the military impact of the program, but also on the question of whether the United States should revive its own civil defense effort.

U.S. Civil Defense Was Cut Back

Started during the Eisenhower Administration, the program was accelerated in the early 1960's under President John F. Kennedy. In 1964, Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara announced that the increasing size of the Soviet and American missile arsenals made civil defense unworkable and the American program was cut back.

The Soviet Union expanded its civil defense program in recent years, placing it under a senior Soviet general. No firm estimate of the cost of the program is available, but officials believe that it is at least 10 times larger than the current American effort.

Some private analysts say that the Soviet Union could protect over 75 percent of its population against nuclear attack. Although this estimate finds little support in the Government, Pentagon officials express growing concern over the long-term impact of Soviet efforts. Secretary of Defense Harold Brown noted in his annual report earlier this month that the current study of the problem "may result in recommendations for changes in the current civil defense program."

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